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THE
HUDSON RIVER OVERSLAGH,
AND
COEYMANS BOUWERY.

On the 16th of June, 1875, the Albany Institute held its 18th Field Meeting at Mull's Fishery, one of the state fish-hatching stations, under the direction of Mr. Seth Green, about ten miles below the city. Among the speakers on the occasion was Mr. JOEL MUNSELL, who entertained the audience with the following reminiscences of the locality.— *Albany Evening Times*.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

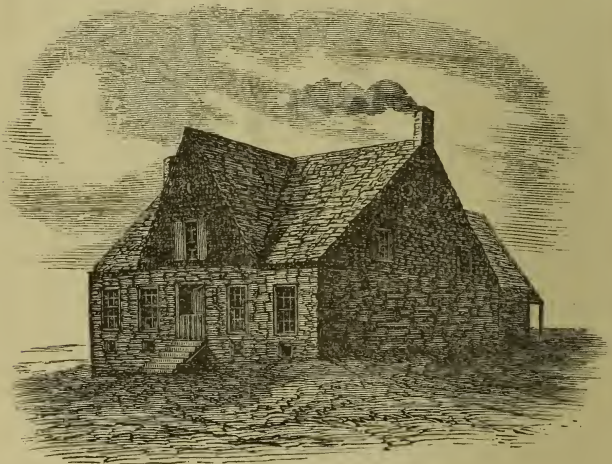
It is probably familiar to you that the water you see hereabout, so long known for its wholesome properties in affording sustenance to shad and sturgeon, is no other than the great Hudson river. It is often said of some men, not particularly noted for energy or push, that they will never turn the river up stream. But if you were to go a very short distance further south, you would see the river run up stream at times with great force, and this phenomenon is claimed to be one of the diversions of the man in the moon.

Although the point we occupy is nearly a hundred and fifty miles from the city of New York, we are but about six feet in perpendicular height above it, as you may guess, or the tide would not set up here as it does; and it is remarkable, though no discovery of mine, that there are at all times three tides in the river, so great is the distance they have to ascend before they reach their destination at Albany, and so persistent their effort to attain that end.

It is two hundred and sixty-six years since Henry Hudson, searching for a passage across the continent, sailed up here in his Dutch ship the Half Moon, and arrived at this point on the 19th of September, 1609. Here he anchored his ship, and having a suspicion of the channel above, he sent a boat up to investigate it. The result was, that he did not venture any further with the ship, and the reputation of the Overslagh has been very bad ever since. It has never ceased in all time its efforts to get its head above water, and as they continued to construct the steam boats larger and larger from year to year, the perplexities occasioned by the Overslagh were not confined to the navigators of the boats alone. How often, alas, was the majestic progress of the New World arrested midway on the bosom of the Hudson, by running upon sand bars in the fog, and when the latter cleared away there was presented to the eyes of the anxious merchant, the beleaguered shores of Papsknee island, when he had a note to pay at the Bank of Albany, and no balance to his credit, and no hope of getting up before the bank closed — of course had to go to protest, and pay Mr. Nicholas Bleecker seventy-five cents besides! In the meantime his wife and children up in the city were leaning all the morning out of the scuttle, and straining their eyes in the direction of Wolven hoek, the Bucken plaat, and the Overslagh, and wondering what had got pa!

But what may we be called upon to witness now, when they are about to reverse the order of nature and turn the river up the Patroon's creek to satiate the unquenchable thirst of the Albanians. If the Patroon's creek is inadequate to water the whisky and milk at present, what will result to navigation then? What will become of our fish nursery here? The locusts are coming, and it was fondly hoped by some of us, that when every green thing on land should be consumed, we would have Mr. Green's fishes to fall back upon. But the fishes require water, and are known to be as great drinkers even as the citizens of Albany, who, having consumed the Patroon's creek, are now craving the waters of the dark rolling Hudson, regardless of navigation and of Mr. Green's lively young fishes.

This is a very interesting region, historically speaking, but there is not time to say much of it. These shores, on both sides of the river, were a part of the manor of the Van Rensselaers, reaching from Beeren island, which you see yonder, up to Cohoes, and extending far inland. Upon Beeren island was erected the patroon's castle, to defend his manor from encroachment. The castle is gone, and the stone guns have disappeared that once stood upon its battlements, and in their place they have erected some modern structures, termed ice-houses! marking the progress of the peaceful arts, so called, and the beating of the implements of war into ice-plows and ice-hooks, a wonderful thing to contemplate!



The Coeymans Castle, built by Barent Pieterse.

Barent Pieterse Coeymans also came over from Holland, after the Van Rensselaers had got things fixed pretty much to their

satisfaction, and settled down there where you see the village of Coeymans. Seeing no such emblem of civilization as a gallows standing anywhere hereabout, he thought he had fallen upon a location as far beyond the reach of human possessions as "the boundless contiguity of shade" so much desired by Cowper. So he bought an immense tract of the Kats-kil Indians, extending ten miles on the river to Coxsackie creek and twelve miles into the wilderness. What was his surprise to learn, as he did, that he was still within Van Rensselaer's colonie. Whereupon he purchased the patroon's claim by paying a quit rent of *nine shillings* a year, and finally obtained a patent for the whole of it from Queen Anne, of blessed memory. Barent Pieterse had sons and daughters, but all his descendants after the first generation were females, and the family name is now extinct in this state—one of the calamities imminent to any family, until woman's rights come in vogue!



The Oldest House now standing in Coeymans.

The old stone mansion of Ariaentje Coeymans, built in the last century, is seen on the north of the village, a quaint old edifice, the interior of which has been modernized, much to the regret of visitors. The floor timbers, which were large and fine specimens of the product of the early forest, were most admirably polished

and waxed, but have been covered up with lath and plaster by some of the modern occupants, and the Dutch tiles which served for the base around the spacious rooms and hall, and up the stairway, have been removed. A single room has been left in its original condition for modern builders to marvel at. The wooden portion of the edifice seen at the north end, was appropriated for the negroes, an adjunct of all similar establishments of the last century in this vicinity.

The portrait of Ariaentje, with which tradition has connected some mysterious legends, is still preserved, representing a tall,



Portrait of Ariaentje Coeymans.

plain woman, in whose dress some rare material is discovered.

The nine mile tree, of which only the stump remains yonder, was for many years a noted land mark for the navigators of the river, in this difficult strait.

Above it you observe the village of Castleton, not particularly remarkable for anything of itself, except as one of the pleasant and thriving villages of the Hudson valley; but on one of the elevations behind it was formerly the castle of the Mahicans, one of the most populous river Indian nations, whence the village derives its name. The excavations of the rail road company in the brow of the hill disclosed an Indian burial ground, populous with skeletons long mouldering there, and abounding in relics apparently of great antiquity.

Castleton is a part of the town of Schodack, extending south to the village of that name in sight yonder, which was first settled by tenants under the Van Rensselaer leases. The vicinity seems to have been populous when Hudson arrived here in 1609. It is recorded that he landed here and passed a day with the natives, greeted with all sorts of barbarous hospitality, as Mr. Lossing describes it, improving upon the log book; the land, the finest for cultivation he ever set foot on; the natives, so kind and gentle that when they found he would not remain, and feared that he was about to leave them because he apprehended danger from their weapons, they broke their arrows in pieces and threw them in the fire. It is here that the shallows and sand bars begin, so formidable to the navigators of this part of the river, not because of any actual danger, but of tedious detentions caused by running aground. A vast amount has been expended in dredging and dyking, by which a little more depth of channel is gained. In former years the sight of from twenty to fifty sail of river craft of all kinds fast aground at low tide was not rare, and the amount of profanity uttered by the sailors was sufficient to demoralize the whole district. The Normans kil is held largely responsible for the sand brought in here, but it is also the deposit of the water coming down from all the streams above, and the slacking of the current on reaching deeper water and meeting the tide setting up from below. Efforts have been made for nearly a century to overcome the obstructions here, but it is a kind of doctoring that has only a temporary effect.

Citizen Genet, whose residence upon yonder eminence, gave him a view of this vexatious locality, became so distressed with the disasters he was constantly called upon to witness, that for many years he interested himself in the vain effort to awaken the merchants and capitalists of Albany to the importance of a ship canal to connect with the deep water at New Baltimore, which would enable the largest vessels to land at our wharves. But he found no spirited coadjutors to second his aim, and his head was laid in the dust, without having seen his favorite project so much as noticed to any efficient extent.

In slower times when a sloop got aground it is said that they proceeded to cast anchor and sat down unconcerned to smoke their pipes for a fortnight, or until some northern rains increased the volume of water and lifted them off the bar. I dont know how far back this tradition can be traced; it was current before my time.

It will be recollected that Gov. Marcy was once held responsible for this formidable obstruction, and the navigation was daily chronicled at low water, to his political disadvantage. While in congress he had voted with his party against all appropriations for the improvement of harbors and rivers, as being unconstitutional, and the papers teemed for a long time with pasquinades on Mr. Marcy, and his farm, as it came to be termed. As thus:

Deserted by the famed *small light*,*
 When all around proclaims it night,
 On Marcy's farm all snug aground,
 The skipper looks distressed around,
 And hears the ripple far away,
 And sighs for tides and coming day.

What sticks there captain? quickly tell.

A sloop.

The deuce!

Good night, all's well.

Or sailing towards the Bucken plaat,
 The overslagh awhile forgot,
 The careful crew patrol the deck,
 To guard the sloop from threatened wreck,
 And while their thoughts oft homeward veer,
 They find the vessel will not steer.

What depth there, captain? quickly tell.

Why, none.

What, none!

Good night, all's well.

The Mahican Indians occupied the eastern border of the river, from Lansingburgh to New York, and were a powerful confederation of tribes. The Mohawks occupied the western shore from the Catskill mountains north, except the site of Albany, which they seem never to have wrested from the Mahicans. The Delawares extended from the Catskill mountains south to Virginia. As the white settlements encroached, the Mahicans retired eastwardly to the valley of the Housatonnuc in Massachusetts, where their descendants, known as the Stockbridge Indians, were for a long time religiously instructed by the Moravians among others, and finally abandoned the chase as a means of procuring subsistence, and adopted the arts of civilized life. A small remnant of these once-powerful Mahicans is now living, as thriving agriculturists, on the shores of the Winnebago lake, in the far northwest.

Of course a great deal more might be said in this connection, but time being short and others waiting to have their say, I vacate this rostrum in their favor.

* A political allusion to Gov. Throop, who began his message, "Whereas the wisdom of man is but a small light shining around his footsteps," &c.

